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William A. Van Duyne

My Seventy-First Birthday.

JULY 24, 1878.

"Woodman, spare that tree,
Touch not a single bough,
In youth it sheltered me,
And I'll protect it now."—*Old Song.*

A shadow falls across my path to-day,
As if projected from that old oak tree,
Bringing fond memories of my boyhood's play,
And young heart filled with glee;
When 'neath its cooling shade, in sultry hours,
I found delightful refuge from the sun,
And climbed and clambered through its leafy bowers;
But now, I'm seventy-one!

It is my birthday's shadow falls again,
Marking my years, as doth the dial's line,
While far behind me lies life's trodden plain,
Of weary tracks the sign.
Along its toilsome road I've traveled far,
Wishing full oft my lengthened journey done,
But following onward still my guiding star,
Till I am seventy-one!

Its cheering beam should now more brightly shine,
To help the dimness of my purblind eyes,
Showing the blessed light of hope divine,
Instead of tears and sighs!
But pale and paler grows its feeble ray,
Leaving obscure the dangers I would shun,
While in adversity's dark path I stray,
For I am seventy-one!

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Old age is often bathed in sunny smiles,
For tender hands its furrowed wrinkles smooth,
Its sorrow oft some loving heart beguiles,
And anxious cares doth soothe.
Decline should find me, like that aged tree,
Protected for the good my years have done,
But them I sheltered most have gone from me,
And I am seventy-one!

Meanwhile my compeers come with silvery hair,
"Poor remnants of themselves" whose work is o'er,
And round me still I see the young and fair,
Basking on life's bright shore.
Sweet children play about my trembling knee,
Whose little lives have only just begun,
Soon by them all, forgotten I shall be,
For I am seventy-one!

What matter? Life's highway is ever full;
As one moves past another fills his place,
One fainting soul finds all its ardor cool,
Another wins the race!
And so from toil and care I soon shall rest,
For my long task in life is nearly done;
Soon shall I sleep upon earth's mother breast,
For I am seventy-one!

Why should I wish to stay, when joy is lost,
And effort palsied by regret and pain,
When little recompense rewards the cost,
And labor is in vain!
The truest hearts are gone who loved me well,
Dearest and best, I fondly called "my own!"
In their blest spirit-land I fain would dwell;
For I am seventy-one!

But hath my harp lost all its tuneful strings?
Will love ne'er sweep again my spirit-lyre?
Shall not new hope arise on angel wings,
And light again its fire?
No more will I lament my hour so near,
Nor quarrel with my years so nearly run,
But rather banish all regret and fear;
Though I am seventy-one!

Where love and friendship faithfully abide,
  Birthdays are days of joy! So may be mine;
And onward still my life serenely glide,
  My star still shine!
For faithful hearts are left, to mine most dear,
  The light of loving eyes hath not all flown;
Many there be would shed for me a tear,
  Though I am seventy-one!

Yes! Rather let my fainting soul rejoice,
  Gather new courage and march bravely on;
Hark to the note of conflict's stirring voice!
  Fight till the victory's won!
Congratulate me then and joyful be!
  Another year for me is now begun,
With happiness in store for you and me;
  Although I'm seventy-one!

WILLIAM A. VAN DUZER.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *July* 24, 1878.

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